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Ledbetter, Eleanor Edwards

Winning friends and citizens for America

New York

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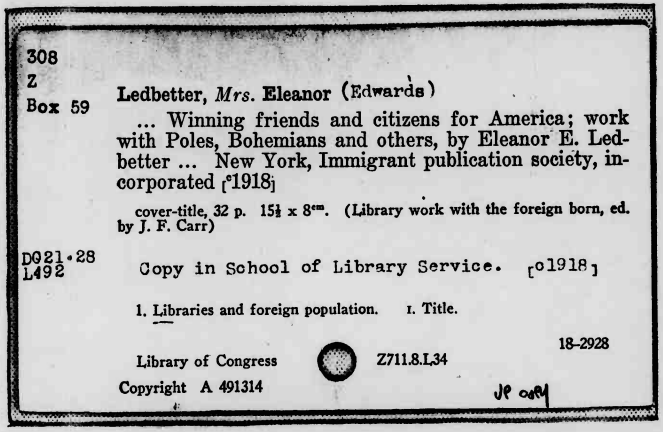

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LIBRARY WORK WITH THE FOREIGN BORN

EDITED BY

JOHN FOSTER CARR

# WINNING FRIENDS AND CITIZENS FOR AMERICA

## WORK WITH POLES, BOHEMIANS AND OTHERS

BY

ELEANOR E. LEDBETTER

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# WINNING FRIENDS AND CITIZENS FOR AMERICA

By Eleanor E. Ledbetter

"FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY" in five different languages on the glass of the front door extends a welcome to them. It can be read from the passing street cars. And in such crowds with new world eagerness they come, that our door-step was worn one-third through within five years. Besides the swarms of daily casual visitors, we boast ten thousand names on our register of borrowers, and not more than one name in twenty-five can be correctly pronounced by the average American. We know that from frequent amusing tests!

Our readers vary with the hours. In the morning come old men, moving slowly and often bent with age; busy housewives with market baskets on their arms; dear old ladies with kerchiefs on their heads. At midday we have well-set-up workers from the nearby offices who spend part of their noon hour with us. After school, promptly after three, throngs of school children rush in, often leading the little brothers and sisters with them. At night our crowds are mostly working men and girls, who have had their supper, changed their clothes, and come to us for an hour, or for the evening. Here and there in the current, too, is a boy who seems about to qualify as a corner loafer, or a girl, whose

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gaudy clothes and bold manner make you tremble for her future. Nearly all speak in strange tongues and many a one wears some bit of strange dress.

There are those who talk of "foreigners" as of some queer kind of wild animal, to be approached only to within a discreet distance, and that, when armed with an elephant hook or an iron tipped spike. The anxiety with which an occasional friend regards an excursion into the "foreign districts" makes one laugh, when it is not too exasperating.

The truth of the matter is that foreigners are "just folks," like the rest of us, and the first essential to any successful library work among them is to get rid of the separating idea implied in the use of the word "foreign." We humans have resemblances, as our Shylock maintained in wrathful logic, to cover every need and act of life. Why should we magnify differences until we wound hearts and "teach villany"? To be sure, all people of foreign birth are not alike, nor are any of them just like Americans. It is only fair, however, to remember that no two Americans are just alike. The Bohemian and the Pole, those brother Slavs, in all essentials of thought and living differ no more widely than the New Englander and the Southerner, or the Southerner and the Westerner. The word "foreigner" is, therefore, only a term of convenience, not of large descriptive value, and after my years among them, our friends in the



"foreign districts" certainly seem to me to differ from the American stock, not in fundamentals, but only in minor characteristics. Like us, they are honest and sincere, or the reverse. They love and hate, they trust and distrust, just as we do. They are kind friends, good neighbors, intensely grateful for kindness from others, and, to their credit, be it said, less nervous and more even tempered than we are.

They are separated from us mostly, because they do not understand English, but friendly intercourse is still possible on the basis of common needs and common experience. The smile of true fellowship, the little instinctive act of human interest, like picking up a child's toy, or helping a woman with her bundles, the contagion of laughter over one's desperate efforts to be understood,—these are a part of the universal language which serves for all races. A mother need not understand English to have her heart warmed by one's admiration of her baby. She appreciates the interest shown in straightening her boy's coat collar, or in finding him a book that suits him, even though she does not understand a word of the conversation which accompanies the pantomime.

To do successful work among these people then, it is necessary, first of all, for the librarian to meet them with a human interest, strong enough to express itself without the aid of English. It is necessary that she go out and get acquainted with

her people as they live their common every-day life, as they nurse the numerous babies or bargain for the family provisions at the market.

Indeed, I count no part of my day more profitably spent than that while I am waiting my turn at the meat-market. Before its spotless benches stand a throng of women, chattering a babel of languages. One always feels that if one listens hard enough one may understand what they are saying and so, listening, I wait half an hour for my turn and then forget to claim it when it comes. Once I may have thought myself superior to any butcher, but this butcher commands four languages, while I have only one and, though I acknowledge it with regret, I fear he is my superior in ready courtesy.

I reached this humble conclusion one day when I had listened to an animated discussion, partly in English, partly in Bohemian, regarding a "first cut" of beef. The customer objected to the piece offered. It was not what she had asked for, she said, and she maintained her point until it was admitted that one cut of steak had been taken from the joint.

I said: "I wish I could ever hope to know as much about meat as that."

Chesterfield himself could have made no better reply than the suave:

"You must remember, Mrs. Ledbetter, that she has kept house a good many more years than you have."



I have always remembered, too, with chagrin, how long it took me to realize that here one should say, "Good-bye," on leaving a store. Failure to do so is a social error, which is barely excusable on the grounds of ignorance.

And a German woman, whom once I should have estimated simply from her appearance, since she wears neither corset, collar, nor hat, taught me the fallacy of superficial judgment by telling me where to find the best receipts for canning vegetables, and by furnishing valuable annotations from her own experience. I understand now, that if she does not dress as I expect a woman to do, it is not from ignorance but from deliberate choice. And who shall say that her choice is not wise? Not I!

Thus getting to know my neighbors accomplishes a two-fold purpose. It cultivates a healthy humility in me since, wherever I am, on the street or in the market-place, I learn so much from them. And it creates a friendly feeling between us that paves the way for them to the library. There, at least, I have something to give them.

The immediate neighborhood about our library is all Bohemian and German,—fully ninety per cent. Bohemian. Just beyond is a district, chiefly Polish, which we also reach, and to the east, within walking distance, is a Slovenian colony of four thousand people. The Slovenians are commonly called "Greiners"—a term

probably derived from "Krain," the German name of their home country of Carniola, a province of lower Austria. "Greiner," however, is not without offense and its use can only be considered a vulgarism. Besides these four peoples, not far away and frequent readers of ours, we have some Croatians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Russians, Finns, Swedes, Italians, Armenians and Roumanians. The extent to which the various races and languages are mingled, is well illustrated in a family, one member of which visits the library to draw books for all. His parents are Slovak; he himself reads English, German, and Bohemian; while his wife is Hungarian.

In meeting these foreign friends of ours, you must know something of their social and historical backgrounds. You must know, for instance, that the Slavic races have often maintained their own languages at incredible cost and that this fight to preserve their native tongue has enabled each people to keep some remnant of unity in spite of fearful oppression. There is a little story of Daudet's called the "Last Lesson," which etches a vivid picture of a nation's bitterness, when compelled, as was Alsace-Lorraine, to swallow the nauseous dose of a conqueror's speech. The old schoolmaster's shaking voice echoed the heart vow of a whole people, groaning under the new tyranny of Prussia. For when he had heard the last recitation in the beloved tongue and his



sturdy little Frenchmen were putting their French primers away forever, he said: "You must never forget your native language. No nation can be entirely conquered as long as it keeps that."

Thus the unhappy Pole, in spite of the terrors of oppression, clings to the language of his forefathers. Poland, "the knight among nations," was three times brutally divided by its conquerors and is still a nation without a government. But, we should never forget—it is a personal debt for each one of us—that when, two hundred and fifty years ago, the infidel Turks were before the gates of Vienna and all Europe and our whole western civilization were in danger, it was Poland's king, John Sobieski, passionately supported by the whole Polish nation, who sprang forward and turned them back.

Do you fear Polish illiteracy? Then you do not know that in the year 1500 the Poles had a school for every 2,250 inhabitants; that they had the first governmental department of education in the world; that after the partition of their native land, whenever a breathing spell came in the heart-breaking struggle for freedom, the libraries and schools were laboriously rebuilt; that even under the tyranny of the knout the work prospered, a great national movement, to teach children secretly the forbidden arts of reading and writing; that today one popular Polish educational society has enrolled 38,000 members; and that now, although the Poles have been

compelled to speak Russian in one place and German in another, Polish literature still thrives wonderfully. If you take the trouble to look, you will find their literary societies everywhere among us here in America, and only a little while ago we read that they had founded another college in Pennsylvania.

And the Bohemian! You should know and remember that he is proudly conscious that his nation led all Europe in culture in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The University of Prague was founded more than fifty years before the German universities—it counted more than 7,000 students in 1378—and for long years was the intellectual center of the continent. But in 1620 Bohemia was overwhelmingly defeated by the massed forces of Germany and, in the black years which followed, Bohemia's rich and abundant literature was destroyed. For very nearly two centuries the life of the nation was almost obliterated. Even the preservation of the language was long in doubt. Then about the time of our Revolution there was a new birth of the national spirit. The official recognition of the Bohemian language was secured and a foundation was laid for the important literature of modern Bohemia.

With these historical backgrounds in view, the purchase of Polish and Bohemian books for our libraries cannot be regarded simply as a concession to the taste and wishes of "ignorant foreigners,"—



called "ignorant" often only because they do not know English. On the contrary, these books form an addition to our shelves of really valuable and distinctive works of literature, for which we are fortunate to have readers sufficient to justify their purchase.

And how do these Bohemians and Poles and people of many other nations respond to our efforts to give them something from our library? They come! Not only our worn door-step but the crowds in our reading rooms every afternoon and evening give heartening proof of it. The daily average during the winter months runs to well over a thousand. And this counts only those who sit down and read. Many, many more exchange their books without stopping. Our circulation is intensive, for we have only some 4,000 Bohemian books and about the same number of Polish, besides a fair German collection. These are in constant use and their circulation represents so much pure pleasure and satisfaction. To meet our demands last year we had to borrow books in fourteen other languages, from the city library system. For to find books in one's own language in a foreign land is next to finding living friends, and only the exile can appreciate what it means.

The Sunday edition of a Bohemian daily recently gave up its entire first page to an illustrated article about us, the inch-high heading of which, translated, reads: "The Broadway Free Library, the Pride

of the Bohemian One-Fourth of Our City." Such interest, undoubtedly sincere, warms the very cockles of our hearts, but its value to the world at large lies in its unconscious betrayal of civic pride. And for our own profitable inspiration we feel that the public institution, which can arouse this feeling in a neighborhood of foreign born, is making thereby a contribution to citizenship, perhaps equal in value to its work as an institution. And how proud we are of the loyalty of our foreign born friends! In the Second Liberty Loan campaign, the two wards nearest our library made the best showing of any wards in the city both as to total amount and as to the number of individual subscriptions.

In opening up what one might call "this new field," there are several important avenues of approach. There are the clubs of many kinds—often very generously helpful—and there is the press. The foreign language newspapers are almost invariably edited by men of good general intelligence, who are vitally interested in the progress of their race. They have usually been in this country a long time,—perhaps were even born here of foreign parents—and they understand American institutions and ideals. The library needs no explaining to them; often they are the ones to assist in making up the titles for your first book-order, when you decide to start a shelf in their native language. And they are more than glad to make an-



nouncement when the books come. Their whole attitude is one of friendliness and co-operation and, as their papers often have wide circulation, they are very valuable allies.

Equally helpful is the interest of the priest, without whose consent one may not visit the parochial schools. His general attitude is that of a shepherd guarding his flock and, as behooves a careful shepherd, particularly if he is a newcomer himself, he is apt to be suspicious of all strangers. He may have been brought up in an atmosphere of distrust. He may have come from a country where the separation of church and state really means the hostility of the state to the church, and not as with us the benevolent interest of the state in every sincere religious work. And like many another immigrant he may have had disillusioning experiences on first landing in America. The public library may be unknown to him and he may fear some ulterior motive. But he is certain to believe in books, and often lends his own collection among his parishioners, so the problem becomes simply that of getting acquainted.

This is not always easy. It is certain to require tact and,—particularly if the priest is a stranger to American life—certain unsuspected conventionalities of approach. It puts one in a position to receive consideration, if a little trouble is taken to do the correct thing. The time to go to him with your definite errand

usually is between nine and eleven in the morning, when the clergy keep what are practically office hours. You should never go on Saturday or on great church days. And since the American business woman's freedom may seem lack of propriety to a man bred in an old fashioned world of reserve, it is better for you to take a companion. You may need to seek an introduction from someone who has his confidence. If you call without this formal preliminary, he may open the door a crack, threatening to close it immediately, until you win a grave smile from him, as firmly, appealingly, you place your hand on the knob. But even such cases of apparently hopeless "frost" in the beginning eventually melt most delightfully and, at your very next visit, you may be invited in and have the opportunity to engage in a very intelligent general discussion—sometimes in broken English on his part, and sometimes in still more broken German on yours, for German is a kind of *lingua franca* with these Slavic peoples—on the value of reading to supplement school work and the resources of the library along these lines. If you want to make the evidence of your good will overwhelming, you then only need ask him to suggest a few useful books that the library could supply. That there are certain due limits of choice he will easily understand. Once we have gotten acquainted I like to call about twice a year just to keep him reminded of the library!



The Sisters who teach in the parochial schools sometimes have an idea that the library contains only "silly books." Then we ask permission to send a small collection for their examination. When finally "Sister Superior" begins to send to the library for books for her own use, we know that the parochial school is won. And what a friend it can be!

We are continually pushing our work in many less formal ways. Any reasonable pretext for a "home visit" is seized upon and, where, as in a recent case, twenty-eight children of the neighborhood crowd in to assist at the interview, we feel that the library has received valuable advertising. We never seem to get out of range of children who announce to the world at large: "Here come the libery teachers." Even the grown people notice us, as was evidenced by the neighbor who, called to act as interpreter, said: "I seen two nice laties coming down the street, and I t'ought, 'Where is dey going?'" We were obliged to hasten this interview, as she had left her baby on the bed and was afraid it would roll off. She was only a young thing herself, but she said: "I got two babies, and one dead alretty,—that makes three." We did not know whether she wanted us to congratulate her on the number or to condole with her on her loss!

On such trips in the neighborhood, we take a supply of circulars and placards in the various languages and visit some of

the little groceries, of which there is at least one in every block. Each little store is the social center of its group of customers, and no better place can be found from which to start a bit of useful gossip about the library. So we step in, introduce ourselves to the proprietor, who is invariably a woman,—the man of the family being employed in the mills or at his trade. She always knows a few words of English, though sometimes it is difficult to find the right ones. She tries to understand as hard as we try to make her and, with much laughter among us all, some degree of success is attained. When we bring out the placard, she gives us choice of all the available space in the shop—sometimes there isn't much—and we put it up ourselves, having learned never to be without the indispensable box of thumb-tacks. Then we leave a handful of circulars to be distributed among her customers and, after urging her to be sure to come to the library herself or, if she hasn't time, to let the children "fetch her some nice book," we go on to the next block, assured that our visit will be discussed throughout the neighborhood within a few hours.

For these visits the little folks are always the best interpreters. Generally speaking all the children speak and read English. This is because, very early, their associations become English-speaking. It is the new language that they hear on the street and in the school. The



public schools, of course, use nothing else and most of the parochial schools use English the greater part of the day. English rules, though the child's home surroundings may compel a colloquial use of his mother's tongue.

I said "mother's" intentionally, for here is the tragedy of the immigrant woman's life. Her children learn English in school and in the street; her husband learns it at work; but she learns only at second hand the few words that husband and children bring within the home. One woman I knew was considered to have died of loneliness. The family had prospered and had built a nice home in a good neighborhood, —but she had no one to talk to!

It is to such people that our foreign books mean the most. The second generation use them but little, the third not at all. But for the first generation, particularly for the old people and the women, they are a priceless boon.

The most comprehensive round of visits that we have ever made was in connection with the distribution of our printed Polish catalogue. While it was in press, envelopes were addressed—with the greatest pains taken to have the names spelled correctly—to all our Polish borrowers and, also, to the members of all Polish churches, lodges and societies which had available lists. The finding lists were then enclosed, together with an illustrated circular in Polish, descriptive of the library. We added our English lists, "Books for Be-

ginners in English" and "Books About Citizenship, United States History and Government." These envelopes were then arranged by streets and routes for distribution. This was made really personal. If the person addressed had moved, his new address was secured, if possible. And if his successors were Polish, our leaflets were, of course, left with them.

In districts where we wished an opportunity to observe living conditions, the visitor lingered and allowed the conversation to drift away from its original subject to a variety of friendly topics. Where we expected least English to be spoken, the route was covered by a Polish speaking assistant. But any one can, when put to it, pronounce a name with a rising inflection which will ask: "Are you so and so?" If the person addressed was not the right one, then "Polski?" was a very serviceable word of introduction.

While this distribution was going on, a little girl came to the library, saying: "All the other Polish people on our street got their 'books,' but ours did not come. So my father sent me down after it." And a woman who first became acquainted with the library at this time, told us later, in Polish: "My husband used to drink and beat me but, since he found that he can get Polish books at the library, he reads with us every evening and our home is very happy."

The most inspiring visits are probably those made to night-schools. During the



winter months, there are, within walking distance of the library, six night-schools, having a registration each year of six or seven hundred persons, all trying to learn "the English." It is pathetic to see men and women of all ages, often gray-headed, and with toil-worn hands, weary after a day's work, still ambitious enough to spend an evening at night-school. They work so hard over a "First Reader" or "English for Foreigners," that one feels it a high privilege to be able to offer them aid.

We have, therefore, made a collection of "Books for Beginners in English." It includes not only the usual books for study, but some "easy reading" books from the children's room, whose contents are sufficiently practical and informing to be interesting to adults. These books are eagerly welcomed by the working men, who are our most diligent readers. They wish knowledge for practical purposes only, with no consideration of literature. They have learned the vocabulary of work from the foreman and their fellow-workmen. And when they have read a certain number of "easy books," they are able to graduate to the newspapers. Thus equipped, they often think that they have English sufficient for their needs. We watch over these "beginners" hopefully, however, and should feel that we had failed if one were to become discouraged, or to leave the library unsatisfied. We try to recruit their numbers, too, from among our

readers, who come for foreign books, and who speak little or no English. Without appearing officious, we call their attention to these books quite casually in passing and then, if they seem interested, we pause to show them the most attractive and practical book on learning English that we can find. Of course, citizenship follows English and this leads directly to our Friday evening citizenship classes. It is a great pity that to enlist their interest and help them in these first steps that there are so few good books about America in the foreign languages. Descriptions of American life and manners, histories and books about politics are greatly needed.

What books do our readers choose? Works of fiction in foreign languages are not in so great demand as might be supposed. But a few are popular in all languages. Among them are "Ben-Hur," "Robinson Crusoe," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "With Fire and Sword," and De Amicis' "Heart of a Boy." Most of the standard novels, particularly those of Dickens and Dumas, circulate well in Bohemian and Polish. "I Promessi Sposi" is vastly more popular in Bohemian than in English with us. Tolstoi is eagerly read.

Cook books are in great demand, too, and it is an indication of the cosmopolitanism of our clientele that, when a child says: "I want a cook book for my mother," we ask automatically: "In English"?

The Bible is constantly asked for in all languages. A little boy returning a copy



recently which he had had a month asked anxiously if he might not keep it for three months more. Being told that that would not be possible, he explained pleadingly: "But my father wants to read it through. He can't read all the time, for he has to work." It was the Bible in Polish, and, alas, the mark was at the 27th Chapter of Genesis.

Technical books of all kinds are heavily used. Books on the mechanism of automobiles are in constant demand, while those intended for the users of motor cars are little called for. In all mechanical lines, in fact, our interests are with the ones who make, rather than the ones who use; the producers not the spenders.

History, science, and socialism are popular subjects. We always have some students bent on self-culture. There was a barber who came in regularly for such topics as "a description of an awfully mean man," "an account of a political convention," "description of a sunset." He was taking a correspondence course in English. A second-hand store man read exhaustively one winter in Goldsmith and Addison. A Bohemian young man of my acquaintance has the best general knowledge of English literature of any one I have known. He had to go to work immediately after finishing grammar school but, as he is a natural student, he has employed his evenings wonderfully to his advantage. His opinions of authors and their individual works are entirely original

and are thought out so deliberately and with such clearness of judgment that they are more definite and balanced than ours, which are influenced more or less by the opinions our teachers and professors and laborious critics have handed on to us.

A social worker once asked me in patronizing tones: "Now, what kind of books do these people read?" I answered with some indignation: "Just the same kind as other people." But I think they read better books than the people of the average American community. How many Americans habitually read fiction of the grade of Sienkiewicz? Yet his works are always the most popular of Polish books. The thirst for knowledge seems greater among the foreign born than among us. Ambition is a motive of real force with them, evidenced to us in a hundred ways.

We do all in our power to stimulate these ambitions. And we have our chance, because our public is very diffident. It is only the high school or college student who walks in arrogantly and demands the satisfaction of his needs. The "average reader" enters modestly, answers our "Good-evening" with reserve, and tries at once to eliminate himself from our vision. A little later he may be seen gazing in a dazed sort of way at the shelves where the religious books are found. Questioned, he says he doesn't want anything in particular, "just to look 'round." The discerning assistant knows better, however, and points out an interesting book here and



there, with a simple summary of its theme. Soon she evokes an answering spark. He grows confidential and explains that what he really wants is something to improve his English. He had left school after the fifth grade but, through a night-school course, has fitted himself for a good position, where he now feels the insufficiency of his vocabulary. Of course, he does not say it in these words. It is because he can't express himself that he has come to the library for help.

Or it may be that he only wants a "story book—a *roman,* you know—for the Missis," but in either case he would continue to hunt blindly if we did not seek his confidence. And we are particularly glad to get a chance to help the "Missis"!

An old Bohemian was seen with the vague look, which is a sure index of such a search. He rejected our first overtures but, finally, in a burst of confidence, explained that for two years he had been wishing to find a book he had once had. He did not know the title nor the author nor anything about it but, oh yes, he did know the contents. "It was about a leetle kid—a boy, you know—what lived with de animals—like animal, you know."

The immediate production of the "Jungle Book" gave him a pleasure that was really touching and he explained to every assistant on his way out how long he had wanted that book, how he had once spent a whole afternoon looking for it, and how he had "never t'ought to find it."

A very gratifying incident was that of the chemist to whom "Adrift on an Ice-Pan" was recommended as a book likely to interest him. Returning it, he reported enthusiastically the impression made upon him by Dr. Grenfell's courage, resourcefulness and indomitable resolution. Recognizing St. Anthony's as a familiar name, he looked up his letter-files, found that his firm had been sending anesthetics there, and at once gave practical proof of his interest by writing to Dr. Grenfell that thereafter such supplies would be furnished to St. Anthony's without charge.

Quite different is the story of the nineteen year old lad, who came in because he had no other place to go, and requested information about the workhouse. Without going out for a meal the poor boy sat in his chair all day, with a hunted look, as if he expected to be taken into custody any minute. In the course of the afternoon he unfolded his tale. He had seen a fellow-workman mangled and had in consequence lost his nerve and quit his job. His father had no sympathy with such softness of fibre, his step-mother naturally had less, and they had had him arrested as a vagrant. The judge had given him ten days in which to find a job—a sentence of bitter irony, at a season of the year when better workmen were being laid off all around. He spent three days with us and then, just when, through the agency of one of our club leaders, a job seemed near, he disappeared, and we understood that he had been "caught." Six weeks later he escaped from the workhouse. He came in to finish the book "Starting in Life," then went over to the police-station and gave himself up for the rest of his term.



It is pleasant to relate that the poor fellow got a job after his release; and the last time I saw him, he said that he couldn't stay long because he was in a hurry "to go and see his girl."

In Cleveland our foreign branches are considered posts of honor. The new assistant learns more from the atmosphere of the place than from specific instructions. She sees that the greater the "foreignness," the greater must be the effort to understand, the more pronounced must be the courtesy. When a foreign born man gets inside the door and his courage seems to fail, every one understands that some one must go to him, and make at least the gestures which say, "Come in." Anyone can ask: "Ceski?" "Polski?" "Russki?" By that time, he says, perhaps: "No, Slovenski." And then one looks for the right interpreter. We cannot well get along without assistants who speak the languages. But if it happens that there is not one on duty, we can almost always find a reader who is glad to help. With new borrowers, who do speak some English, I always tell the right assistant: "Just drop into Polish—or his native tongue, whatever it may be—before he leaves, so as to make him feel more at home in the library."

The new assistant quickly grasps all this. The one thing I often have to take up with her is her criticism of "these unpronounceable names." She only needs to be told that these languages, for all their apparent difficulties, are absolutely phonetic, that CZ, for instance, is exactly as good a combination of letters as its English equivalent CH, and so forth!

Our circulation of adult English fiction, like foreign fiction, is small, proportionately, compared with that of most public libraries, but it furnishes a very interesting part of our work, as we have large opportunity for guiding the reading. Our readers, here again, are not influenced by the literary standing of the authors who please them,—as a rule, in fact, they pay very little attention to the author. All they ask is that he shall have written "a good story." They rely upon the library assistants very largely for the selection, and while we do not need to have the last best seller unless it is really worth having, we must at all times be able to recommend "two good love novels for myself"; "a nice story for my mother"; "a western story for my big brother"; "a sea story for my pa"; "a love story for a married lady"; and "a book for a young lady twenty-two years of age."

In making these recommendations, we try always to keep in mind the cultivation of ideals. There are too many among our readers, who think that to succeed means to acquire property, to have good things



to eat, or to achieve the extreme style in clothing and hair-dressing. Books of direct ethical teaching do not touch these people but they are, nevertheless, greatly influenced by what they read. The refined, unselfish heroine and the dauntless hero, who places honor above worldly gain, have a real mission to perform and furnish standards by which the daily life is more or less unconsciously measured.

Standards of living are raised, also. The girl who shares her attic bedroom with both brothers and sisters is not slow to discern that all the heroines of fiction go to bed in night-gowns and sleep between sheets. Observation of the shop windows shows her that such customs are not confined to fiction, and she develops a discontent, which is appeased only when the family move to a larger house on a better street, where there are bedrooms enough to meet the standards of propriety, which she has learned in her reading. The interest of these girls in books of etiquette is rather pathetic, and one sees that the ambition that drives the young men to technical books is the same force which makes the young women desire to raise the social status of the family.

But, when all is said, probably our best work is done in the children's room. For this is fundamental. The little ones come to us when they can only look at picture-books. Usually they are brought by the older brothers and sisters, or by the uncles and aunts, who are still children them-

selves. It is not uncommon for children to bring their little kinsmen to the library the day after they arrive in Cleveland, fresh from the journey across the seas; and the pride of our little friends in the introduction, their zeal as interpreters, is very amusing. Nowhere can be seen tenderer care of the little children by the big ones. "Our baby," on his first visit to the library, is introduced to all the "libery teachers" and is quite the guest of honor. As soon as he learns to write his name, he "starts libery," and the children's librarians have the responsibility of his reading from the very beginning. It is directed, partly by personal attention and partly through the influence of the "story hour," to make sure of which he arrives before the doors are opened on Saturday morning.

A Sister at one of the parochial schools told us of a little girl whose absence from school on Friday afternoons had become so usual that the Sister sent for her mother to expostulate. The mother was regretful but explained that it was necessary, since she had to have her at home to help scrub and clean the house.

"But why can't she do that on Saturday morning?" asked the Sister.

"Oh, but on Saturday she must dress herself and go to the library to hear the stories," replied the mother.

And the best of it, from our point of view, was that the Sister generously let it go at that.



Our children do not care much for fiction. But they are devoted to fairy-tales, especially the folk tales of primitive days for which they have a remarkable fondness. The literature of fact is very interesting to them, and history, biography, science and the useful arts are better read than any fiction.

Any casual observer in this community can see the difference between the children who read and those who do not. The children who do not read have a vocabulary so limited, a power of expression so feeble, that it is often positively painful to hear them try to tell you something; while the children who have been in the habit of using the library speak freely and fluently, even though English is not used in their homes.

And the library reinforces the work of the school in other ways, teaching the children many things outside of books, too:—cleanliness, order, care of public property, regard for the rights and convenience of others, respect for authority. The regard for our books as public property is very high. The obligation felt to the library by our readers was dramatically expressed by a little Slovenian girl, who came in all out of breath, and explained without a pause but with plenty of expression: "This book was due yesterday, and I forgot all about it, and today I said to my mother: 'Oh mother, this book belonged to go back to the libery yesterday!' and she said: 'My God! you run!' "

Our community has come to learn that we will serve almost any friendly need. A boy begged the janitor to let him in at six o'clock one winter morning, saying, "I want to wash. Our water's all froze." A lost baby was brought over from the police-station where the officers had been unable to calm her "high-sterics." Even she felt herself among friends and slept peacefully in our staff room until the frantic mother came after her.

Discipline? Well, we have our troubles, the most serious of which are with the working boys from fourteen to eighteen, whose roughness, ignorance and uncouthness make them really objects for pity, though, unhappily, that is not the sentiment they most often inspire. My own feeling toward them has never been very harsh since the night when I took a firm grasp of the arm of a fifteen year old boy who had committed a very serious offense. I was shocked to find my hand close round his arm more easily than it did around the arm of my own little six year old. I took a fresh look at him, and saw that he had probably never had a really, square meal in his life, that he probably had no decent bed, and certainly never lived where fresh air was considered necessary, and my righteous wrath at the offense faded into pity for the offender.

Of course the real point is that the library is not what these boys want at all. They come because it is the only place that is warm and free. When the city



government was seized with a sudden access of zeal for the enforcement of the ordinance excluding minors from pool-rooms, as many as two hundred boys of this type visited our reading rooms every evening, held books in front of them, and tried to look interested in the printed pages. In fact very few of them were capable of reading seriously, and the best we could expect from most of them was to look quietly at pictures in the illustrated magazines, which we had bound for their special benefit. Even this they generally could not do for more than half an hour at a time.

With the younger children, misbehavior is comparatively easy to manage. There are mischievous ones sometimes, like Alfred, to whom I said one day: "Why did you come in today, Alfred? You didn't want to read." "Oh," said Alfred, "Anton said: 'Come on, let's go to the libery and get chugged out.'" But, in general, they all realize how infinitely attractive the library looks to the "fellow" who has been "chugged out."

If, however, misbehavior becomes too frequent, we make a "home visit," which proceeds along this order: In response to our repeated knocks, the door is cautiously opened a few inches, and we ask: "Is this Mrs. Kowalski?"

She nods guardedly, leaving us doubtful as to just how much English she understands.

But we proceed: "Emil's mother?"

She nods more freely. She acknowledges Emil.

"We are from the library. We want to speak with you — — "

"Oh"—a long drawn sound of comprehension—"the ladies from the libery! Come in, come in!"

The door is flung wide. If it is a home of the better class we are ushered into a neat, well-furnished parlor. If a poorer home, the door opens directly into the kitchen living room, where chairs are cleared of their contents and dusted for us, and the babies are shooed out of the way.

We plunge at once into our errand. "Emil hasn't been behaving very well at the library, lately, and we thought you would like to know about it."

She assents, and we give an explicit account of Emil's offenses and the penalties, if any, making clear our reliance upon her co-operation.

She is pained, she thanks us for coming to tell her, and she says concisely: "I 'tend to dat Emil."

When we leave, she says again: "I am 'shamed dat you ladies had to have so much trouble, to come here 'bout dat Emil."

This interview varies according to the mother's English. If she does not speak English herself, there is usually in the house a daughter "out of school," or a younger sister, who can act as interpreter. Sometimes she goes far afield, leaving us in the yard, uncertain as to what we have



to expect. Only once have we failed entirely. That time we waited patiently a long while but, when she came back, instead of bringing an interpreter, she had only a bucket of coals!

Naturally, handling the numbers we do, we have to be always on the alert. The gong of an ambulance or the clang of a fire-engine is a call to quarters for our staff. Each assistant puts herself instantly in the best position she can reach to command the exits, and prevent a rush. One day, reaching out to stop a boy who had taken the first flight of steps at a leap, I caught his shirt and it tore. He was very angry, and proposed to stop right then and there and make me pay for it, but a companion interposed: "Aw 'gwan! Your mother didn't sew it good anyhow."

Each year has seen the library grow to be more and more a part of the community life. New interests, new lines of work are constantly developing. Our public has grown less diffident, and its wants have increased, both in number and in definiteness. Probably in no other sort of a neighborhood is it ever possible to open so many new interests to one's readers, to afford such genuine delight as is often expressed in the exclamation: " I did not know there were such books!"

The rewards to the librarian? The greatest, it seems to me, is to be a part of a life that is real; to deal always with the genuine, never with the veneered; to share pleasures and disappointments; to associ-

ate with people who are advancing, and whose advancement one can assist; to give help where help is appreciated and where gratitude follows; to learn so much that is interesting; to become personally interested in the geography, the history, yes, even the mail service, of many countries; to become, without travelling, a citizen of the world. This is not working; this is living!

For myself, I have long ceased to think of anyone at all as a "foreigner." I may say: "She does not speak English," precisely as I say: "She does not knit," but I do not feel that she is any different on that account. It would be very monotonous to me now to hear only one language spoken in the streets and to see only English newspapers read in the street-cars. Our neighborhood is not "foreign"; it is cosmopolitan—especially if you think of the blood of its people and the equality of their respect for one another. But it is also American. It is slowly changing, not through any hasty and unconsidered propaganda, but by mutual helpfulness and the big and patient spirit of our country that finds its way into every part of our daily life, even into the broad and dreary streets of our smoky neighborhood. It is our happy lot to try to speed the change, to make friends and citizens for America.

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